DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 917 RC 021 887

AUTHOR Wagner, Elaine
TITLE The Vision of Sequoyah: A Bibliographic Essay.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alphabets; American Indian History; *Cherokee; *Cherokee (Tribe); Inventions; *Written Language
IDENTIFIERS *Sequoyah; Sequoyah Syllabary

ABSTRACT

In 1821, Sequoyah, a Cherokee Indian, presented to his tribal council a syllabary of the Cherokee language--an invention that enabled a previously illiterate people to read and write in their own language. This document includes a brief essay describing Sequoyah's life and accomplishment and a bibliography of further resources. Sequoyah was born near Echota (Tennessee) in the 1760s, used the name George Guess, was a self-trained silversmith and artist, and never learned English. Sequoyah experimented with existing Cherokee pictographs and invented others, but soon recognized their limitations. A syllabary is appropriate to the Cherokee language as all syllables are vowel sounds or consonant-vowels, and there are fewer consonants than in English. Many syllables begin with a "hissing S" sound. By giving this sound its own symbol (the only alphabetic character in his system), Sequoyah was able to limit the number of symbols to 85. His system was so adaptable to Cherokee speech and thought that it could be learned in a few days. The years surrounding Sequoyah's invention saw the breakup of the tribe into scattered groups and the eventual removal to Oklahoma. Sequoyah's syllabary provided a means for the various Cherokee groups to communicate and reunite. In addition to a Sequoyah Web site, the bibliography lists 16 journal articles, 5 audiovisual items, 12 books, 14 juvenile books, and a dissertation. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elaine Wagner
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The Vision of Sequoyah: A Bibliographic Essay

Elaine Wagner
Reference Department
Woodruff Library
Emory University

ED 428 917

In 1821, Sequoyah, a Cherokee Indian, presented to his tribal council a phonetic alphabet of the Cherokee language, an invention which enabled a previously illiterate people to read and write in their own language. Sequoyah did not read or speak English but was aware of the existence and use of writing. His use of the concept and its application to the Cherokee language is an example of idea or stimulus diffusion, the adoption or adaptation of an idea which is advantageous to the adopting culture. (Kroeber 1940:1-3) Although it is difficult to establish proof of stimulus diffusion, Sequoyah's syllabary incorporates 25 characters from the English alphabet with different values, which indicates that he did have access to printed English. His invention of a syllabary instead of an alphabet can be attributed either to the fact that the syllabary is more appropriate to the Cherokee language or to the probability that he did not understand the principle of an alphabet.

Sequoyah was born between 1760 and 1770 in an Indian village near the Cherokee capital of Chota or Echota in the present state of Tennessee. The name Sequoyah has no meaning in Cherokee and is thought by Cherokees to be an adaptation from a word in some other Indian language. His mother was the sister of chiefs, and his father was believed to be Nathaniel Gist or Guess, a white trader; Sequoyah used the name George Guess. The question of the identity of Sequoyah's father interests white biographers but seems unimportant to the Cherokees as their society has always been matrilineal. (Kilpatrick 1965:6) Clan membership is important to the society of the Cherokee, and the son of a Cherokee woman is considered a member of his mother's tribal clan. Marriage within the clan is discouraged and was at one time punishable by death, as women within one's clan are to be considered sisters.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RC 021 887

Sequoyah, or George Guess, grew up as a Cherokee and never learned English. He became a self-trained silver smith and artist and made his own paint brushes and paints, obtaining color from berries and roots. This artistic ability was an obvious asset in the creation of his syllabary. There are various versions of his decision to learn to write the Cherokee language, including one from the Wahnenauhi Manuscript by Lucy L. Hoyt Keys, the grandaughter of Sequoyah's cousin, George Lowery. The manuscript, which was written from stories told to Lucy Keys by her grandfather, is now in the Smithsonian Institution's archives. (Kilpatrick 1965:8) All of Sequoyah's biographers seem to agree that although Sequoyah could not read, he was aware of the value of writing. He is reported to have told a friend that part of the red man's wisdom died with him, as his sayings could be forgotten or misunderstood. (Starkey 1946:81) Cherokee Indian pictographs had been used prior to Sequoyah's experiments including the use of colors: white expressed peace or happiness, black - death, red - success, and blue - defeat or trouble. (Gelb 1952:19, Mallery 1972:624) Sequoyah first recorded the known pictographs and invented others but soon realized that it would be very difficult to remember a symbol for each word, and the complex verbs of the Cherokee language were impossible to express in Cherokee pictographs.

As Sequoyah continued to work on a system of writing, concentrating on syllable sounds, his friends and neighbors suspected him of experimenting with magic. He frequently avoided people and could be seen in the woods making marks on wood, and many feared that he was talking to spirits. Those Cherokees who had learned to read English at the mission schools didn't understand why he didn't learn English.

In 1817 George Guess was listed as one of the signers of a treaty with Andrew Jackson which relinquished a section of Indian territory in Alabama. The signers of this treaty were considered traitors, and in 1818 a group of 300 Cherokees including Sequoyah moved to Arkansas. Here he continued to record and study the syllable sounds of the language. A syllabary is appropriate for the Cherokee language as all of the syllables are vowel sounds or consonant-vowel

sounds. There are fewer consonants in Cherokee than in English, and most syllables end in vowels. By omitting those beginning with the Cherokee hissing S sound, Sequoyah discovered approximately 80 syllables. He then invented a symbol for each sound, and the symbol which he used for S is placed before other syllable symbols when needed. The S symbol is the only character in his syllabary which is used as an alphabetical character. This ingenious arrangement enabled him to limit the symbols to 85. After a Cherokee speaker learns the 85 symbols, he can read, as the name of the character is the same as the sound of the syllable. (Gabriel 1941:103) The pronunciation is always the same - a practical system in contrast to the learning of a 26 letter English alphabet, which is only the first step in learning to read English.

Three years after his departure for Arkansas, Sequoyah returned with his syllabary and written messages from the Arkansas Cherokees. He stayed in the East only long enough to teach the system with the assistance of his daughter Ahyokeh (or Ahyoka); it was so adaptable to the speech and thought of the Cherokees that it could be learned in only a few days. Through their newly acquired literacy, the Cherokees in Arkansas were reunited with those who had remained in the East, as the two groups began corresponding in their own language. This was the first of Sequoyah's efforts to reunite a divided Cherokee Nation. In that year the council presented a medal inscribed, "Presented to George Gist by the General Council of the Cherokee Nation, for his ingenuity in the invention of the Cherokee alphabet, 1825." Sequoyah is reported to have worn the medal for the rest of his life. (Foreman 1938:7-8)

After the introduction of his script to the Cherokees in the East, Sequoyah returned to Arkansas to adapt the syllabary to the Choctow language. He also created a number system; however, the Cherokee Council preferred the Arabic numerals which were already in use. The Indians in Arkansas received copies of the Cherokee Phoenix and were aware of the conflict regarding the tribal lands, and they were experiencing similar problems with white intruders in their territory. In 1828 Sequoyah and six other Arkansas tribal members went to Washington and signed

a treaty which exchanged the Arkansas territory for the land in Oklahoma, which became the home of the Cherokee Nation. Some members of the tribe considered the signing of a treaty a traitorous act and advocated that the Cherokees fight to retain their lands. While he was in Washington as a member of the delegation, Sequoyah's portrait was painted by Charles Bird King. The painting shows him wearing the medal awarded to him by the Cherokee Nation.

After the Indian Removal Bill of 1830, approximately 13,000 Cherokees were forced to begin the overland trip to the Indian territory in the West. It is estimated that over 4,000 died on the journey that the Cherokees call "The Trail of Tears." The tribe was at that time divided into three groups: those from Arkansas who had settled in Oklahoma voluntarily, and two factions of the Cherokees from the East, those who had supported the signing of the treaty of New Echota, ceding to the United States all Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi, and the majority of the tribe who had opposed the treaty. Sequoyah represented the Western Cherokees and helped organize meetings of the three groups to settle their differences and unite. On July 2 of 1839 they were united as the Cherokee Nation, and the document of union was signed by George Guess as "President of the Western Cherokees" and by other leaders of the three groups including Sequoyah's cousin, George Lowery. (Foreman 1938:35)

In the early 1840's Sequoyah, still hoping to reunite all Cherokee peoples, led an expedition into Texas, which was then part of Mexico. He and his son, Tessee, and seven other members of the expedition located the village of Cherokees who were living in the area, but were unable to persuade them to return to Oklahoma. The returning party reported that Sequoyah had died and was buried near the Red River.

Although it was over 170 years ago that Sequoyah proved that his people could communicate by putting marks on paper as the white man did, there is still much interest in his life and accomplishments. The following articles, audiovisuals, books, and dissertation have been published in the years 1980-to date. Information about Sequoyah can also be found in many

biographical dictionaries and handbooks, and there is a Sequoyah Web page at: http:/www.powersource.com/powersource/gallery/people/sequoyah.html.

ARTICLES

Chaffin, Tom "The Cherokees get it in Writing-1828," Atlanta Journal and Constitution. Dixie Living, Section M, p.2 Feb. 17, 1991.

Dillon, Doug "Cherokee Teacher," Boys' Life 83:10, 1993, p.15.

Donaldson, J. K. "Sequoyah: An Example of Changing Euro-American Perceptions of the Lives and Accomplishments of Native American Leaders." Second Biennial Conference on Culture, Society and Change in the Americas, 1993, pp. 57-72.

Foster, L. "Sequoyah: The Cherokee Genius (Development of the Cherokee Syllabary)," American West, 18:6, 1981, pp. 24-25.

Hranicky, William Jack "A Scribe and a Warrior: A Cherokee Legacy" (Sequoyah and Stand Watie), Chesopiean, 25:4, 1987, pp. 15-26.

Monteith, Carmeleta L. "Literacy Among the Cherokee in the Early Nineteenth Century," Journal of Cherokee Studies, 9:2, 1984, pp. 56-75.

Perdue, Theda "The Sequoyah Syllabary and Cultural Revitalization," Symposium entitled "The Southeast at the Time of Columbus: Evidence from Linguistics and Archaeology," Southern Anthropological Society Proceedings, 1994, v. 27, pp. 116-125.

Scancarelli, Janine "Cherokee Writing," Chapter in Daniels, Peter T. & Bright, William, (Eds.), The World's Writing Systems, (pp. 587-592). New York: Oxford U. Press, 1996.

Schlich, Kim and Victor Schlich. "Talking Leaves," American History, 1995, 30 (5), p.38-40.

Skelton, Amy Elizabeth "Sequoyah, 1776-1843," Franklin County Historical Review, 1992, v. 23, pp. 17-22.

Walker, Willard "The Design of Native Literacy Programs and How Literacy Came to the Cherokees," Anthropological Linguistics, 26:2, 1984, pp. 161-169.

Walker, Willard "How Literacy Came to the Cherokees and the Role of Ahyokeh in the Demonstration, Validation, and Refinement of Sequoyah's Syllabary," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Dec. 7, 1982. ERIC Document ED231586.

Walker, Willard and James Sarbaugh "Early History of the Cherokee Syllabary," Ethnohistory, 40:1, 1993, pp. 70-94.

"The Cherokee Indians," (Sequoyah, 1770?-1843; Rogers, Will, 1879-1935), Cobblestone Magazine, 5:2, 1984.

"Old Cricket Says," Cricket Aug. 1989, p. 64 (Discusses Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee syllabary.)

"Where an Alphabet was Born," Southern Living, 23:4, 1988, p. 33.

AUDIOVISUALS

Learn from Famous People. Kit 2. Thomas Edison: Keep on Trying, Sequoyah: Have a Goal in Life. (2 filmstrips, 1 sound cassette, 2 guides) Birmingham, AL: Direction Films, 1982.

Native Americans in North Georgia. [computer file]. Woodstock, GA: Golden Ink Internet Solutions.Text (HTML), graphics.
http://ngeorgia.com/history/findex.shtml

Sequoyah. (Series: The People: Profiles of Native Americans) 1 videocassette, 1 teacher's guide. Ada, OK: Sigma Educational Media (distributor), 1989.

Sequoyah: Story Pak. (Series: Graphic Learning Literature Program. Biographies) 8 story cards, 16 sentence strips, 1 easel, 1 teacher's guide, 1 story sheet, 1 cassette. Original story by Lynell Johnson; retold by Kathleen Hollenbeck; il. by Mike Eagle. Waterbury, Conn.: Graphic Learning, 1991.

Sequoyah, Creator of the Syllabary. (Series: Native Americans) 1 filmstrip, 1 soundcassette. Chicago. IL: Nystrom (Eye Gate Media), 1990

BOOKS

Dameron, John Sequoyah and the Talking Leaves: a play. Tahlequah, OK: Cross Cultural Education Center 1984, 45 p.

Foreman, Grant Sequoyah. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press 1984 (Seventh printing) c1938, 85 p.

Gilmore, E. L. Sequoyah. Tahlequah, OK: Cherokee Studies Institute 1992, 25 p.

Hoig, Stan Sequoyah: the Cherokee Genius. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society. 1995, 160 p.

Hurt, Gerald. Stories of Cherokee Chief Thomas Graves and his Friend Sequoyah. Colcord, OK [s.n.] 1995, 15 (7) leaves, photocopy.

King, Duane H. The Sequoyah Legacy: Official Guidebook to the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum. Vonore, TN: Sequoyah Birthplace Museum, Cherokee Communications. 1988, 64 p.

Moore, Suzanne Painted Speech: a Written Celebration of Sequoyah's Cherokee Alphabet Ashfield, MA: Suzanne Moore. (This is a handmade, one of a kind creation.) 1988, unpaged.

Moore, Suzanne Tracing Magic Lines: 4 Tributes to Sequoyah and the Cherokee Syllabary. Ashfield, MA: Suzanne Moore. (This is a handmade, one of a kind creation in a clam shell box.)1990, unpaged.

Moreland, Willis D. and Erwin H. Goldstein Pioneers in Adult Education. (Includes Sequoyah, 1770?-1843, Cherokee leader and silversmith p.19-33) Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall 1985, 271 p.

Sutton, Barton Sequoyah. Marshall, Minn: Ox Head Press (Poems) [16] p. (300 copies)

Tichy, Rose Great American Indians. Cleveland, Ohio: Project LEARN (Readers-Adult, Book 3). 52 p.

Waters, Frank Brave are My People: Indian Heroes not Forgotten foreword by Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lives of Native American prophets, warriors, statesmen, and orators, including Sequoyah). Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Pubs. 1993.

Juvenile Books

Cwiklik, Robert Sequoyah and the Cherokee Alphabet. Parsippany, NJ: Silver Burdett Press 1989, 129 p.

Danielson, Carl Talking Leaves: a Musical about Sequoyah, a Cherokee. Schulenberg, TX: I.E. Clark (Libretto) 1989, 25 p.

Gleiter, Jan and Kathleen Thompson Sequoyah (Stories Series). Austin, TX: Raintree-Steck Vaughn Library 1991, 32p.

Klausner, Janet Sequoyah's Gift: A Portrait of the Cherokee Leader. Scranton, PA: HarperCollins Pubs. 1993, 111p.

Lobb, Nancy 16 Extraordinary Native Americans. Portland, ME: J. Weston Walch 1997, 134 p.

Marzollo, Jean My First Book of Biographies: Great Men and Women Every Child Should Know. (36 one-page sketches of famous figures including Sequoyah.) New York: Scholastic Inc., 1994, 80 p.

Petersen, David. Sequoyah, Father of the Cherokee Alphabet. Chicago, IL: Children's Press 1991, 30 p.

Roop, Peter and Connie Roop Ahyoka and the Talking Leaves. New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Bks. 1992, 60 p.

Shaughnessy, Diane and Jack Carpenter Sequoyah: Inventor of the Cherokee Written Language. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group's PowerKids Press, 1997, 24 p.

Shumate, Jane Sequoyah: Inventor of the Cherokee Alphabet. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House 1994, 111p.

Snodgrass, Mary Ellen Crossing Barriers: People Who Overcame. (biographies, including Sequoyah). Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited 1993, 248 p.

Wheeler, Jill The Story of Sequoyah. (Famous American Indian Series). Edina, MN: Abdo & Daughters Publishing Co. 1989, 31 p.

Native American Leaders Resource Guide: [kit]. (24p booklet, instruction sheet, 8 posters, 8 cardboard discs, map.) Hagerstown, MD: Freline, Inc. 1993.

People to Know: A Supplement to Childcraft-the How and Why Library. Biographies include "Sequoyah, who invented a system of writing for the Cherokee tribe." Chicago, IL: World Book 1989.

DISSERTATION

Monteith, Carmaleta Littlejohn (1985) The Role of the Scribes in Eastern Cherokee Society, 1821-1985 (Doctoral Dissertation, Emory University, 1985). Dissertation Abstracts International, 46, 06A.

REFERENCES

Foreman, Grant, Sequoyah, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938.

Gabriel, Ralph Henry, Elias Boudinot, Cherokee, and his America, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941.

Gelb, I. J. A Study of Writing, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952.

Kilpatrick, Jack Frederick. Sequoyah of Earth and Intellect, Southwestern Profiles Series, II Austin, Texas: Encino Press, 1965.

Kroeber, A.L. "Stimulus Diffusion." American Anthropologist, N.S.42 (Jan.-March 1940).

Mallery, Garrick. Picture Writing of the American Indians. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. (Originally published in the Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1888-'89.)

Starkey, Marion L. The Cherokee Nation, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946.